

LESSON PLAN

Conflict Management

TASK: Understanding Conflict Management

CONDITION: In a small group environment

STANDARD:

1. Define conflict.
2. Explain the negative connotations associated with conflict situation.
3. Define the levels of conflict.
4. Describe the sources of conflict.
5. Explain the positive and negative factors of conflict.
6. Describe the methods for managing conflict.

TYPE OF INSTRUCTION: Instruction and small group discussion

TIME OF INSTRUCTION: 2 Hours

MEDIA: Slides

INSTRUCTOR NOTE: If possible, obtain and show videotape of The Abilene Paradox.

LEAD IN: During this lesson we will discuss conflict and conflict management. Unfortunately, conflict can lead to a variety of communication problems and misunderstandings. Conflict in and of itself is neither bad nor good, but in our attempt to deal with conflict, we can set it off to constructive or destructive consequences. The purpose of this training is to help you understand how and why interpersonal conflict can occur and provide you with some strategies for positive or constructive resolution.

PART I. DEFINITION.

QUESTION: Ask students for their definition or meaning of conflict.

SLIDE #1

THE NATURE OF CONFLICT

- **Conflict is inevitable in any group that is together for any length of time.**
- **Different people will have different viewpoints, ideas, and opinions.**
- **Conflict occurs whenever there is no internal harmony within a person, or whenever there is disagreement or a dispute between individuals.**

1. **The Nature of Conflict.** The term conflict was originally defined as "striking at another", "to fight with an enemy or do battle with opposing forces." Later meanings included "being antagonistic", or "a clash between contradictory impulses within an individual."

2. Conflict is inevitable because people will always have different viewpoints, ideas, and opinions. The question is how will you deal with or relate to these differences.

QUESTION: When you hear the word conflict, what kind of picture comes to mind?

SLIDE #2

NEGATIVE CONNOTATIONS (ASSOCIATED WITH CONFLICT SITUATIONS)

- **Getting angry is a waste of time.**
- **They won't understand me.**
- **I'm afraid of the consequences.**
- **Confrontation is unprofessional.**
- **They will only counter my argument.**

3. **Negative Connotations.** One of the destructive consequences that emerges from this definition is the negative feelings that we associate with conflict. When we hear words like ..."war, battle, collision, tension, disagreement, or opposition," we have a negative emotional response that conflict is not only negative, but should also be regarded as dangerous in nature and avoided at all cost. It is unfortunate that such negative connotations are associated with conflict, because, if properly managed, conflict is highly constructive and essential to cross-cultural interactions.

QUESTION: What are some common responses you have heard or said to yourself when confronted with a conflict situation?

- a. Getting angry and arguing is only a waste of time.
- b. If I tell them how I really feel, they won't understand or they will get angry.
- c. I'm afraid how they will react or treat me later.
- d. Anyone who is confrontational is unprofessional.
- e. If I make a point about this now, they will only counter with something else later.

SLIDE #3

LEVELS OF CONFLICT
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Intrapersonal conflict.• Interpersonal conflict.• Intragroup.

4. Levels of Conflict. There are three levels of conflict. It might be helpful in defining conflict if we had a clear understanding of what these three levels are and their relationship to one another.

a. Level one: Intrapersonal conflict is an experience that takes place within the individual. It normally occurs when there is a disagreement between how a person feels about their behavior versus how they really act. For an example, a soldier who feels guilty about telling sexual or ethnic jokes but vigorously participates when friends are around.

b. Level Two: Interpersonal conflict is experienced between individuals in the same location, e.g., coworkers, roommates, team members. It exists whenever people interact or come together to accomplish a common goal or objective. However their background, personality and experiences, being different, may make attainment of the goal quite difficult.

c. Level Three: Intragroup conflict is defined as conflict between groups in the same organization or command. It occurs whenever there is contact or interaction between groups. Sources of intragroup conflict often are caused by

issues of group cohesion, "sticking together, leadership and status, power or influence and lack of or limited resources."

QUESTION: Ask students if they can name some of the causes of conflict.

SLIDE #4

SOURCES OF CONFLICT	
	• Different values and beliefs.
	• Role pressure or clarification.
	• Perception differences.
	• Diverse goals or objectives.
	• Group status or identity.
	• Race, ethnicity, or gender differences.

5. **Sources of Conflict.** Trying to identify or determine the cause of conflict is sometimes difficult to analyze. Heightened emotions or bad feelings may cloud the real cause of any conflict and detract participants from examining the facts. The cause of conflict can also have multiple factors which makes it difficult to isolate just one cause. The following is a list of common causes in conflict situations:

- a. Different values and beliefs.
- b. Role pressure or clarification.
- c. Perception differences.
- d. Diverse goals or objectives.
- e. Group status or identity.
- f. Race, ethnicity, or gender differences.

SLIDE #5

SOURCES OF CONFLICT (CONTINUED)

- **Personality clash or conflict.**
- **Competition for limited resources.**
- **Disagreement on how things should be done.**
- **Personal, self, or group interest.**
- **Tension and stress.**
- **Power and influence.**

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- j. Personal, self, or group interest.
- k. Tension and stress
- l. Power and influence.

QUESTION: Ask students if they have had a recent conflict situation that depicted a situation involving one of these factors.

SLIDE #6

NEGATIVE FACTORS OF CONFLICT

- **Diverts attention from important issues.**
- **May damage morale.**
- **May cause polarization.**
- **Reinforces differences in values.**
- **Produces regrettable behaviors.**

6. Characteristics of Negative Forces. Many believe that the negative characteristics of conflict occur because group members become closed minded to any compromises. It often occurs when someone wants his or her own way. Hostility among group members is normally followed by assumptions of competition, that someone will win and someone will lose.

These negative forces have destructive consequences. The following are some examples:

- a. Diverts energy from more important issues or activities.

- b. Destroys individual morale or self-concept.
- c. Individuals are polarized and forced to stick together.
- d. Deepens or widens existing differences in values.
- e. Produces irresponsible and regrettable behaviors i.e., name calling, back-stabbing, or fighting.

SLIDE #7

POSITIVE FACTORS OF CONFLICT

- **Stimulates interest.**
- **Forum for discussions.**
- **Increases cohesiveness.**
- **Promotes change.**
- **Provides means to work together.**

7. Characteristics of Positive Forces. Earlier we stated conflict was neither good nor bad. If viewed as a natural process, conflict is the opportunity to explore and resolve differences in a constructive manner. Conflict is constructive when individuals or group members have a new understanding of the functions of healthy conflict and avoid the destructive negative forces. For example:

- a. It can stimulate interest as well as curiosity.
- b. It can provide the means for problems to be heard.
- c. Increases individual pride and group cohesiveness.
- d. Promotes personal and social change.
- e. Provides opportunity to work towards a common goal.

PART II. STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVELY MANAGING INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT.

SLIDE #8

METHODS FOR MANAGING CONFLICT

- Denial or Avoidance.
- Suppression.
- Power or Dominance
- Third Party Intervention.
- Compromise or Negotiation
- Integration or Collaboration

1. **METHODS FOR MANAGING CONFLICT.** All conflict given the right opportunity and motivation can be resolved, but not always to the satisfaction of all parties. The effect of disagreement and the methods for resolution depend on how conflict is managed by the participants.

2. The following are some common methods that can help to effectively manage conflict.

a. **Denial or Avoidance.** With this approach, individuals attempt to reduce or get rid of the conflict by denying it exists, both parties shun each other or dodge the issue of disagreement. Individuals refuse to admit that the conflict exists or acknowledge it. Avoidance can be useful as a constructive tool because it gives people time to think more clearly and come together in a more friendly way after tempers have cooled. However, with complete denial, the conflict does not go away. It grows to the point where denial is no longer an option and some other stronger methods are required for resolution. When the issue or time is not critical then denial may be an effective way of dealing with conflict.

b. **Suppression.** "We all get along here", "we run a happy ship", "don't rock the boat", and "nice people don't fight", are the voices of suppression. People who use suppression play down their differences in a belief it is better to "go along to get along." They fail to recognize the positive potential for handling conflict out in the open. Use of suppression may be more effective where it is more important to maintain relationships than to deal with an insignificant issue through conflict.

c. **Power or Dominance.** Power is often used to settle differences. The source of power may be physical, or vested by authority or position. Sometimes this is referred to as "the system" or other higher supervision or management. Power strategies, however, result in a win-lose situation. In other words, in order for somebody to gain something, somebody else has to lose something. Normally

the loser will not support the final decision in the same way as the winner, and may even attempt to sabotage the decision. Future interactions may cause a conscious or unconscious renewal of the struggle. In many instances where time and resolution are critical, power is clearly appropriate, especially where other methods are ineffective or inappropriate.

d. Third Party Intervention. Using this strategy requires a third party that is unbiased and is not taking sides to support either party in conflict. The third party may be known or unknown to the parties involved or may even be from a different location. Some assumptions in using a third party are:

- (1) The third party is trusted or respected by participants.
- (2) All parties involved will accept the decision of the third party.
- (3) The third party has the power or authority to rule over the decision.
- (4) The third party is an expert, has knowledge or is competent to give a decision about the issue(s) in dispute.
- (5) All parties believe a just and fair decision will be rendered.

QUESTION: Can you see any drawbacks in using a third party? (A: third party may consciously or unconsciously instigate or aggravate a conflict by playing individuals against each other.)

e. Compromise or Negotiation. Compromise and negotiation are often regarded as virtues in our culture. Compromise is an agreement between parties about what each should give or get in a particular situation. "You give a little, and I'll give a little so we can meet each other halfway", is a way we have been taught to get along with others. Compromise is closely related to how we first learned to share. It is believed all parties will profit from the compromise or at least have a feeling of being treated fairly. However, compromise has some serious drawbacks. The process of bargaining often causes participants to assume an inflated position, since they are going to have to give up something in the end. In attempting to buffer their loss, the compromised solution is watered down or weakened to the point it is ineffective.

Yet there are times when compromise makes sense, especially if there are limited resources and there is a need to prevent a win-lose situation. Negotiation begins when there is an assumption participants are not locked in an adversarial relationship and all are willing to negotiate. The hope is the eventual compromise will result in a better state of affairs for everyone concerned. Negotiation reaches an impasse when one or all participants become set in what they are willing to give and limits have been reached. The compromise,

therefore, would allow all parties to reach an agreement with which all would be somewhat satisfied or rewarded.

f. **Integration or Collaboration.** This approach requires all parties in a conflict situation recognize the legitimate abilities and expertise of each other in the process of resolution. This method attempts to find an acceptable solution that does not necessarily require giving and getting as in a compromised solution. The group problem solving concept is considered the optimum form of managing conflict because it encourages a common search for creative alternatives to resolve the conflict that is rewarding to all parties. Each individual's position is well-defined and prepared, but the emphasis is placed on resolving the conflict rather than individual view points or positions. The assumption is, two or more people thinking through the process will exceed the efforts of any one individual and result in a more effective resolution. The process of integration and collaboration relies on the good faith that all parties have a sincere desire for a positive alternative to resolve their present state of conflict.

Closing: During this period of instruction we have explored the methods for resolving conflict. We have also compared interpersonal conflict with the other levels of conflict, discussed the negative and positive aspects, components of conflict and how it can contribute to individual and group problem solving. We examined six strategies for effectively managing interpersonal conflict and the negative and positive attributes of each. Are there any questions about the methods for resolving